

The Democratic Republic of Congo is preparing for its first full population census in more than four decades, seeking updated demographic data to guide public planning in a country whose population has grown to more than 112 million, according to United Nations estimates.

The last census, conducted in 1984, recorded 29.9 million people. The U.N. estimates Congo's population at 112.8 million in 2025, highlighting the scale of demographic change since the last nationwide count.

The government says the new census will provide updated information on the size and geographical distribution of the population, living conditions and the services communities require. The data are expected to help authorities plan infrastructure and public services and improve the allocation of state resources.

The actual nationwide enumeration is scheduled to begin in July 2027, Planning Minister Guylain Nyembo said in June. Preparatory work is already under way, including census mapping and the recruitment of personnel.

The government has also said the wider census process is entering a new phase in August, following the start of a public sensitization campaign in July.

The scale of the operation is considerable. The National Institute of Statistics and the United Nations Population Fund plan to deploy more than 200,000 enumerators across the country's 145 territories by July 2027, according to UNFPA.

The exercise is being designed as a largely digital operation, with about 150,000 tablets expected to be used for data collection and to transmit information to central systems for compilation, archiving, security, preliminary analysis and the detection of duplicate counts.

The census will collect information beyond population totals, including data on housing, employment, migration and living conditions, according to Congolese officials. Such information is intended to give policymakers a more detailed picture of the country's demographic and socioeconomic conditions.

The census is also linked to efforts to bring more people into official records and provide identity documents to Congolese who have never had them.

For residents such as Ramazani and Katembo, the exercise therefore involves more than being counted. It also offers an opportunity to obtain official documents and

establish their identity in state records.

Katembo said the identification cards have particular significance for questions of nationality.

“Through these cards, we will regain the nationality we lost over 40 years ago,” Katembo told Al Jazeera.

Conducting the census across Congo will present logistical and security challenges, particularly in parts of the east where access remains difficult because of armed conflict. Authorities have said they are considering technologies including satellite imagery and other remote methods to help collect population data in areas that field teams cannot easily reach.

The operation is estimated to cost about \$192 million over three years, according to recent Congolese reporting. The government has been seeking financial and technical support from international partners, with President Felix Tshisekedi hosting a donor roundtable in March to mobilise funding for the census.

The census comes 42 years after the previous count, leaving authorities reliant on estimates and other demographic data to plan for a population that has more than tripled since 1984.

The government says the new exercise is intended to provide comprehensive and up-to-date demographic and socioeconomic information to improve public policy and development planning.